



THE 1952 INTERSTATE BOOKING OFFICE AT SYDNEY TERMINAL STATION

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On 8 September 1952, a new air-conditioned Interstate Booking Office was opened at Sydney Terminal station featuring open booking counters and a separate room off the main office for the more complex Western Australian bookings. The new Interstate Booking Office was built in an area formerly occupied by a kitchen and scullery, which presumably were no longer required following the closure of the upstairs Dining Room at the station on 1 January 1950.

The finish of the new Interstate Booking Office was its outstanding feature. A decorative scagliola¹ frieze was installed along the top of the walls with historic images of transport in New South Wales from the late 1700s. The 18 metre long x 6 metre wide x 3 metre high frieze was a finalist in the Sulman Prize for 1951² and was designed by Peter Melocco, who migrated to Australia in 1908 from Italy via the United States of America, and was made by Guido Zuliani, an artist brought out from Italy. The

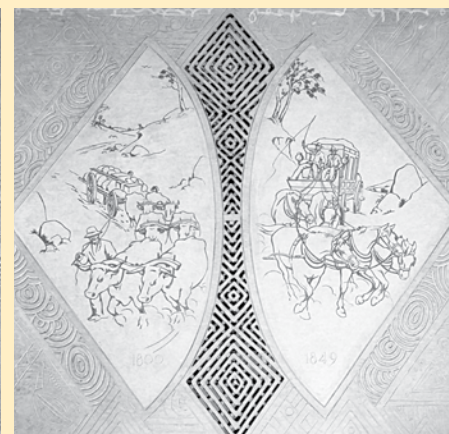
The Interstate Booking Office on the day it opened on 8 September 1952. Standing in the foreground are (from left to right) Reg Winsor (NSW Commissioner for Railways from 1 September 1952 to 31 July 1956), The Hon. J J (Joe) Cahill (NSW Premier from 2 April 1952 to 22 October 1959) and The Hon. W F Sheahan (Minister for Transport from 30 June 1950 to 23 February 1953). STATE RAIL AUTHORITY.ARHS ARCHIVES 864806

¹ Scagliola is made from fine plaster, pigments and glue and is polished by hand to look like marble.

² The Sulman Prize is awarded each year by the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the best subject painting, genre painting or mural project by an Australian artist. It was established within the terms of Sir John Sulman's bequest and was first awarded in 1936.

THE FOUR PANELS OF THE FRIEZE SHOWED THE FOLLOWING:

Panel on the tram colonnade side of the office: There are eight distinct scenes on this panel showing the evolution of transport in New South Wales. Starting from the left-hand side when facing the panel, the first is for the year 1787 and shows the aboriginal community moving by foot before the arrival of the first Europeans. The next shows the arrival of the First Fleet by sea from Britain in 1788 and is followed by a bullock team hauling a wagon in 1800, a stage coach in 1849, the turning of the first sod for the Sydney to Parramatta railway in 1850, the opening of the Sydney to Parramatta line in 1855, the Great Zig Zag at Lithgow in 1869 and the underground railway in 1927.



ALL PANELS: MITCHELL LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, CN: ON 388/BOX 052/ITEM 066, IE16116350



A large marble mosaic map of Australia, including Tasmania, showing the national rail network in 1952. MITCHELL LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

walls below the frieze were lined with travertine, a delicate neutral toned marble, with skirting, architraves and door heads in Mudgee green marble. The counter front and columns had a similar treatment. A large marble mosaic map of Australia, including Tasmania, showing the national rail network in 1951 was installed on the floor, with the following major rail routes being picked out in an aluminium colour:

- Melbourne – Sydney – Brisbane – Cairns
- Sydney – Broken Hill – Port Pirie
- Melbourne – Adelaide – Port Pirie – Kalgoorlie – Perth

The rest of the Australian network was highlighted in a dull red, with the state capitals being shown as red dots and Canberra as a green dot. The map shows a number of long-gone lines, including the Tatong, Stony Crossing and Lette lines in Victoria. There are three shields on

either side of the map, with those of New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland being on the western side of the map and the shields for Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania being on the eastern side. An image of a compass also appears on the floor mural.

All the marble mosaic and scagliola frieze were installed by Melocco Bros. Pty. Ltd. of Annandale.³

With the exception of the chairs and stools, all the joinery, counters and camphorwood tables were manufactured in the Railway Workshops at Chullora. The lighting was installed by the Electrical Branch of the Railways.

Ten booking positions were provided so that extra staff could be provided during busy periods. The booking counter extended the full length of the tram colonnade side of the office and was divided into five distinct sections, namely (1) inquiries, (2) sleeper and seat reservations, (3) Queensland ticket sales, (4) Victorian (except Melbourne) and South Australian ticket sales, and (5) Melbourne ticket sales. A separate office was located at the eastern end of the interstate office for Western Australian ticket sales.

The new Interstate Booking Office undertook the work previously undertaken at Nos. 7, 8, 16, 17 and 18 windows of the General Booking Office located on the Grand Concourse.⁴

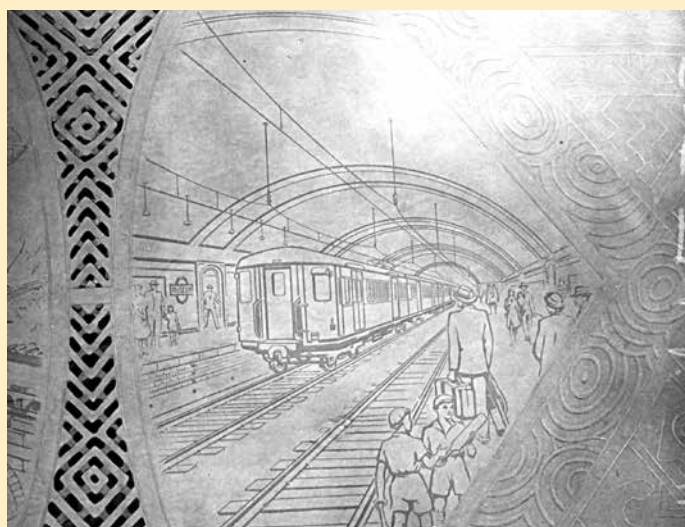
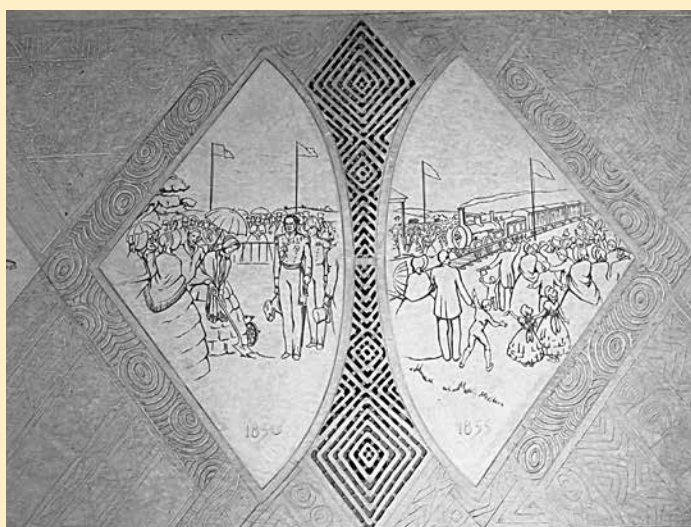
On 3 December 1958, a branch of the Railway Travel Bureau was opened within the Interstate Booking Office. The Bureau was established to arrange itineraries and bookings for intrastate and interstate tours by rail, including break-of-journey stopovers, accommodation and bus or motor coach travel.⁵

Sometime in the mid-1960s, the passageway on the western side of the General Booking Office that linked the Grand Concourse with

³ A photo of the booking office appears in a Melocco Brothers advertisement published on p41 of the December 1955 issue of *Railway Transportation*.

⁴ *Railway Transportation*, October 1952, p4 and November 1952, p27.

⁵ 1958/59 New South Wales Railways Annual Report, p16.





↑ The exterior of the former Interstate Booking Office at Sydney Terminal station, which today is the entrance to the Central Food Market. Photo taken on 10 April 2019. AUTHOR

↓ The former Interstate Booking Office looking towards the frieze located at the Railway Square end of the room. Note the map of Australia showing the railway network on the floor. Photo taken on 20 November 2019. AUTHOR



↑ The emblems for the States of Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales located at the Railway Square end of the former Interstate Booking Office on 20 November 2019. AUTHOR

the former tram colonnade was closed and fitted out as the new Interstate Booking Office. All functions within the 1952 Interstate Booking Office were transferred across to the new office and the former office appears to have become vacant. Presumably there were operational efficiencies achieved by having the interstate and intrastate booking offices together (Can any reader provide more information on the Interstate Booking Office opened in the mid-1960s?).

In 1972, a proposal was submitted to convert the old Interstate Booking Office to a milk bar, but this does not appear to have proceeded.⁶

Between 1976 and 1980, the area was used by the railways for a number of promotional displays, including:

- Between 28 February 1976 and 5 March 1976 inclusive for a display marking 50 years of electric traction on the New South Wales system.
- Between 19 September 1977 and 30 September 1977 inclusive for an audio-visual display of works on the Blue Mountains line.
- In November 1977 for displays related to the Blue Mountains line upgrade, Eastern Suburbs Railway and other projects.
- In September / October 1980 an operating model railway and the railway archives shop occupied the old Interstate Booking Office during the celebrations marking 125 years of the railways in New South Wales.⁷

On 30 September 1980, an instruction was issued to convert the former Interstate Booking Office to a lounge and bar area.⁸

On 20 August 1982, a new passenger lounge and bar were opened within the former Interstate Booking Office area. The lounge had around 50

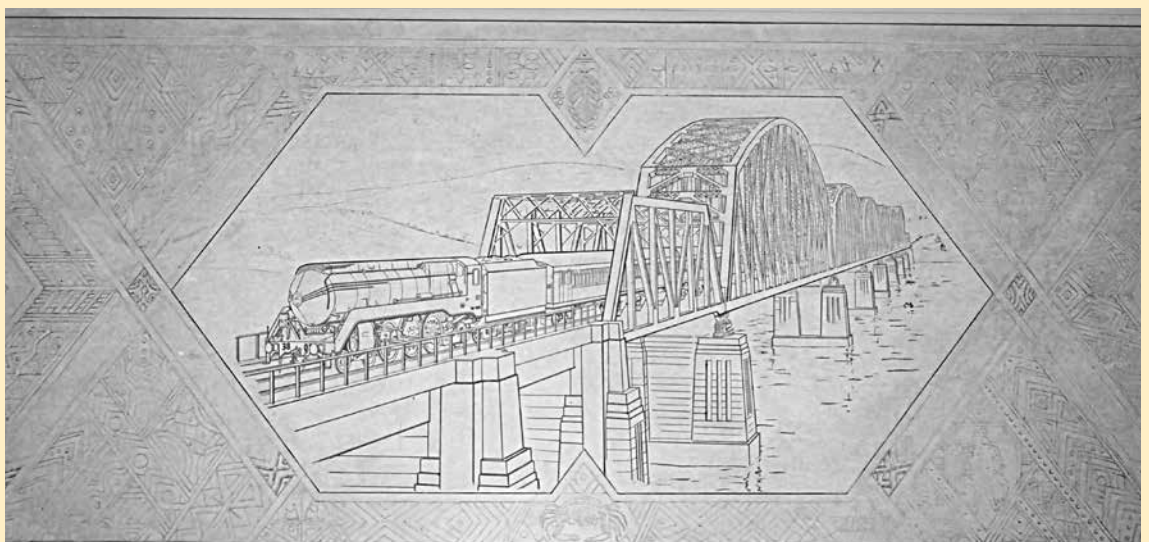
⁶ Advice from Stuart Sharp via email on 19 January 2018.

⁷ *New South Wales Digest*, April 1976, p27, November 1977, p267 and December 1977, p296, and *The Railway News*, November-December 1980, p112.

⁸ Advice from Stuart Sharp via email on 19 January 2018.

Panel at the western end of the room (Railway Square end):

Streamlined locomotive 3805 is shown hauling carriage set NAB 113 across the Hawkesbury River bridge that was completed in 1946.



chairs and closed at 8:00 pm. The original floor was retained with its distinctive map and state emblems. The lounge was subsequently renamed the *Railway Club Bar*.⁹

By June 1996, the bar had evolved into *Carriages Restaurant*.¹⁰ The restaurant was still operating in this area by the beginning of 1999.

Following a refit, a bakery and fast food outlet were opened in this area on 8 November 1999.¹¹

At around 6.00 pm on Saturday 26 September 2015, a fire broke out in the kitchen of the fast food outlet. Fortunately, the fire was contained to the kitchen area, but the whole area was closed to the public from this date.

On 6 September 2017, a development application was lodged with the City of Sydney to convert the disused Dining Hall area at Sydney Terminal Station, including the former Interstate Booking Office, to a café, convenience food store and food outlet. Two other applications for catering improvements at the station were also submitted at around the same time, namely:

- On 16 June 2017, an application was submitted to install a prefabricated coffee kiosk on the Grand Concourse near the entrance to Platforms No. 3 and 4.
- On 31 August 2017, an application was submitted to convert the former State Booking Office on the Grand Concourse to a licensed restaurant.

When completed, all three catering outlets would be operated by international hospitality and catering company Delaware North.

During October / November 2017, the frieze in the former Interstate Booking Office was cleaned

⁹ *Railway Digest*, October 1982, p322 and *A Century of Central* by Robert McKillop, Donald Ellsmore and John Oakes, p110. The Minister for Transport, Mr Cox, had announced the conversion on 15 September 1980 as part of a \$2 million package of works for the station (Source: *Railway Digest*, November 1980, p327, March 1981, p74 and November 1981, p339).

¹⁰ Conservation report held by the ARHS Railway Archives at Redfern.

¹¹ *Rail News Victoria*, December 1999, p11.



↑ A close up of the section of the frieze showing 5801. Photo taken on 20 November 2019. AUTHOR

↓ A close up of the map showing the rail network in the south eastern corner of Australia. Photo taken on 10 April 2019. AUTHOR



Panel on the Grand Concourse (southern) side of the room:

There are three distinctive scenes on this panel from left to right. The first has an image of an AD60 Beyer-Garratt on a goods train in regional New South Wales. The second shows a wharf scene with coal being loaded from rail wagons into ships, whilst the third has 5801 in an industrial scene. The AD60 Class had not entered service when the frieze was being created and so its representation is not as accurate as those of the other locomotives appearing in the frieze.





of grease and other grime that had accumulated over the years, as well as the residue from the fire, by a Transport for New South Wales contractor (International Conservation Services).¹²

In November 2017, work commenced on the task of fitting out the area as a new catering outlet.

In mid-September 2018, a new catering outlet featuring a convenience store, bakery and grill known as the 'Central Food Market' was opened in the former Interstate Booking Office. The frieze, marble walls, floor mural and entry doors, as well as the wall clock of the former Interstate Booking Office were all retained. At the same time, a new dine-in restaurant called '2000 Acres' was opened in the adjoining space.

The other two catering outlets for which planning applications were submitted were opened on the following dates:

- The 'Switchman Espresso' located on the Grand Concourse near the entrance to platforms Nos. 3 and 4 in January 2018. This outlet offers takeaway coffee, snacks and other light refreshments.
- The 'Eternity' restaurant located in the old State Booking Office (known as the General Booking Office in 1952) on Wednesday, 26 September 2018. This facility can seat 220 guests. The name of the restaurant pays homage to Arthur Stace, who for over 35 years (from 1932 to 1967) wrote the word 'Eternity' in chalk in the copperplate style on walls and footpaths around central Sydney an estimated 500,000 times. 🕒

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Peter Neve, Stuart Sharp and John Beckhaus for their help with this article.

¹² ABC News website, Friday 24 November 2017 and *Railway Digest*, January 2018, p56.



↑ The passageway between the Grand Concourse and the Railway Colonnade that was closed off and fitted out as the Interstate Booking Office in the mid-1960s. Photo taken on 20 November 2019. AUTHOR

← When the passageway between the Grand Concourse and the Railway Colonnade was converted to an interstate booking office, a doorway was opened out in the passageway wall to provide staff with access to toilets in an adjoining room. The filled in doorway is still visible and today has a sign mounted on the panelling used to fill in the doorway. Photo taken on 20 November 2019. AUTHOR

Panel at the eastern end of the room (Elizabeth Street end): The Eveleigh steam running depot appears on this panel.

